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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000973

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: FARMERS AND GOA LAUNCH MASSIVE RALLIES
TO INFLUENCE SENATE VOTE

REF: BUENOS AIRES 0963

11. (SBU) Summary: Argentine farmers and pro-government forces staged massive rallies in Buenos Aires on July 15 seeking to influence the Senate vote on the controversial export tax regime (reftel) scheduled for the following day, July 16. The farmers' protest drew a crowd of 225,000 to 250,000 near the Embassy, and the pro-government rally drew 85,000 to 95,000 to the plaza in front of the Congress. Former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) was the key-note speaker at the pro-government rally, spending the first half of his speech reviewing his administration's accomplishments and the second half attacking the leaders of agricultural organizations. Entre Rios Governor Sergio Urribarri and Buenos Aires Governor Daniel Scioli also spoke, focusing on the need to support President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) drive to improve income distribution and social justice. At the farm rally, leaders from the four major agricultural organizations addressed the crowd, but their headline speaker was well-known protest leader Alfredo De Angeli of the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA) in Entre Rios province. Both rallies were peaceful. Although the turnout for the pro-farmer rally was more than twice as large as the government-staged rally, the show of public support for the "countryside" is unlikely to alter the outcome of the Senate vote, which is still expected to approve the government's proposal without modification. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The concurrent farm protest and pro-government rallies gathered large crowds on July 15, the day before the Senate was scheduled to vote on the controversial export tax regime. Argentine press is attributing to "unofficial state sources" estimates that the farm protest near the Embassy drew 225,000 to 250,000 attendees while 85,000 to 95,000 people attended the pro-government rally in front of the Congress. The unusually mild weather contributed to the massive turnout for both rallies, which snarled traffic for hours in Buenos Aires.

Nestor's Plea: Help Cristina Transform the Country

13. (SBU) Standing on a podium emblazoned with the banner, "Defending the Argentine Dinner Table," former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) delivered the pro-government rally's keynote address. He began his 25-minute speech by contrasting the widespread despair when he took office in May 2003 with today's recovery. He touted his administration's claimed accomplishments, such as reducing poverty from 60 to 20 percent, generating 4 million jobs, and ending 30 years of impunity for human rights abuses during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. During the second half of his speech, NK focused on the agricultural export levies

and the need to redistribute wealth and income. He claimed solidarity with agricultural producers while attacking the leaders of agricultural organizations, accusing them once again of sponsoring the 1976-83 dictatorship and conspiring against President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK). He also took aim at speculators and investment pools and asserted that the middle class would never find solidarity with the oligarchy. NK concluded with an appeal for everyone to respect and honor whatever Congress decides on the export tax.

14. (SBU) NK was preceded by Entre Rios Governor Sergio Urribarri and Buenos Aires governor Daniel Scioli, each of whom dwelled on the need to support CFK's drive to improve income distribution and social justice. According to the press, NK ordered Scioli and Urribarri at virtually the last minute to speak to the crowd. In his remarks, Scioli noted that as a former vice president he was well-acquainted with the responsibilities of that position, interpreted as a warning to Vice President Julio Cobos to vote for the Executive bill if the Senate should reach a tie. Cobos was noticeably absent at the pro-government rally.

Farmers' Plea: Argentina Needs to Support its Farmers

15. (SBU) At the farmers' rally, leaders from the four major agricultural organizations spoke, but their headline speaker was the ubiquitous and highly-recognizable Alfredo De Angeli of the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA) in Entre Rios province. Standing on a podium with the banner "For a

Country that Brings Federal Democracy and Dignity for All", De Angeli claimed the rally was a turning point in Argentine participatory democracy and he exhorted Argentines, particularly youth, to continue participating to strengthen Argentina's democracy. He reminded senators they would have to answer to their constituents on how they voted. He added that "people came today not because of agricultural export levies but to see the country united." He called on the GOA to develop a sensible agricultural policy in consultation with governors, mayors, legislators, farmers and all people.

16. (SBU) The farm protests' other speakers included Luciano Miguens of the Argentine Rural Society (SRA), Coninagro President Fernando Gioino, Argentine Rural Confederation (CRA) leader Mario Llambias, and Eduardo Buzzi of the FAA. Miguens noted the GOA's justifications for the tax increase had shifted several times, and suggested the incoherence of the GOA's argument was suspicious. Another SRA leader told television reporters that, even if the Senate approves the bill, there are still serious constitutional problems with the bill, indicating the farmers will take their dispute to court. CRA Leader Mario Llambias brought the rally to a close by thanking those who attended for "betting on the countryside" and said that "all the provinces were present."

17. (SBU) In addition to farmers and producers from rural areas, the farm rally drew large numbers of urban supporters as well as left-leaning protest groups never previously identified with the farmers. Some familiar faces among the crowd included the runner-up in the 2007 presidential race, Elisa Carrio of the Civic Coalition (CC), and conservative Ricardo Lopez Murphy, who won only 1% of the vote in the 2007 presidential election but remains a standard bearer for the center-right, and television reporters mobbed Jose Manuel de la Sota, the former governor of Cordoba and prominent dissident Peronist leader who emphatically called on the Kirchners to change their tack. Also, in attendance were members of the newly-formed dissident faction of the General Workers Confederation (CGT) and several left-wing picket movements.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Wanting to get the upper hand, NK scheduled the pro-government rally to run simultaneously with the farmers' protest. Nonetheless, the government ended up losing the public relations battle as the farm protest's greater attendance -- more than twice that of the government's rally -- demonstrates. Not only did more people attend the farm protest, but those attendees largely made it there on their own, as opposed to the government crowd, which by its banners and organizations was clearly mobilized by labor unions and Kirchner-allied mayors at GOA expense. It is fairly well-documented that Kirchner rally organizers provide free transportation, food and cash to convince people to attend. The show of public support for the "countryside" is nonetheless unlikely to alter the outcome of the Senate vote, which is still expected to approve the government's proposal without modification. Although congressional approval will add some legitimacy to the government's tax increase, it does little to mollify farmers or address their concerns with the exorbitant export duty rates. The agricultural sector and the political opposition have made clear that they will take their objections to court, the next battleground. End Comment.

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